

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (currently amended)        A catalyst-coated membrane with protective film layer comprising:
  - (a) a catalyst-coated ionomer membrane consisting essentially of an anode catalyst layer, an ionomer membrane, and a cathode catalyst layer, wherein said ionomer membrane comprises two surfaces and each of said two surfaces comprising:
    - (i) an active area, wherein said active area is coated with said anode or cathode catalyst layer, and
    - (ii) a passive area; and
  - (b) at least one layer of protective film attached to each of the two surfaces of said catalyst-coated ionomer membrane, wherein said at least one layer of protective film overlaps the passive area and the active area of each surface and wherever the protective film overlaps the active area the protective film is in direct contact with the catalyst layer and there exists a sequence of layers of "membrane-catalyst layer-protective film" with no interposed layers wherein the protective film is in contact with said anode or cathode catalyst layer so that a layer sequence of membrane-catalyst layer-protective film is formed in a region of each active area.
2. (original)    The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1, wherein said passive

area forms a perimeter around said active area.

3. (original) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1, wherein the region of the active area that is overlapped by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 0.5 to 20% of the total active area of the membrane, and the region of the passive area that is overlapped by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 80 to 150% of the total passive area.

4. (original) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1, wherein the at least one layer of protective film comprises an organic polymer material with a thickness in the range of 10 to 150 microns.

5. (previously presented) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 4, wherein the organic polymer material comprises a polymer selected from the group consisting of polytetrafluoroethylene, PVDF, polyethylene, polypropylene, polyester, polyamide, co-polyamide, polyamide elastomers, polyimide, polyurethane, polyurethane elastomers, silicones, silicone rubbers, and silicon based elastomers.

6. (original) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1, wherein the ionomer membrane comprises a substance selected from the group consisting of perfluorinated sulfonic acid polymers, acid-doped polybenzimidazoles, acid-group-modified polyetherketones, ionically conductive organic/inorganic materials and composite reinforced materials.

7. (canceled).

8. (canceled).

9. (previously presented) A membrane-electrode-assembly comprised of:

(a) the catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1; and

(b) at least one gas diffusion layer, wherein said at least one gas diffusion layer covers at least a portion of the active area of said catalyst-coated membrane and contacts, overlaps and/or penetrates the at least one layer of protective film of the catalyst-coated membrane.

10. (original) The membrane-electrode-assembly according to claim 9, wherein the region of the active area contacted by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 0.5 to 20% of the total active area of the membrane, the region of the passive area contacted by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 80 to 150% of the total passive area of the membrane and the region of the gas diffusion layer contacted by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 0.5 to 50% of the total area of the gas diffusion layer.

11. (canceled).

12. (canceled).

13. (currently amended) ~~A method of using the catalyst-coated membrane of claim 1, comprising operating a~~ PEM or DMFC fuel cell stack that comprises the catalyst-coated membrane of claim 1.

14. (currently amended) ~~A method of using the membrane-electrode-assembly of claim 9, comprising operating a~~ PEM or DMFC fuel cell stack that comprises the membrane electrode-assembly of claim 9.

15. (currently amended) A catalyst-coated membrane with protective film layer consisting essentially of :

(a) a catalyst-coated ionomer membrane consisting essentially of an anode catalyst layer, an ionomer membrane, and a cathode catalyst layer, wherein said ionomer membrane comprises two surfaces and each of said two surfaces comprising:

(i) an active area, wherein said active area is coated with said anode or cathode catalyst layer, and

(ii) a passive area; and

(b) at least one layer of protective film attached to each of the two surfaces of said catalyst-coated ionomer membrane, wherein said at least one layer of protective film overlaps the passive area and the active area of each surface and wherein the protective film is in direct contact with said anode or cathode catalyst layer so that a layer sequence consisting of "membrane-catalyst layer-protective film" is formed in a region of each active area.

~~of claim 1, wherein said membrane does not contain a carbon-based substrate.~~